

Milwaukee Ald. Donovan: The scourge of out of control prostitution, drugs

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Citizens across Milwaukee and the metro area would be shocked, embarrassed and angered if they witnessed the blatant prostitution and drug activity taking place on a daily basis at certain locations on the near south side.

For some time Alderman José Pérez and I have been working behind the scenes with Milwaukee Police, with neighbors and others to put a stop to the brazen and disgusting behavior — acts taking place for instance at and near S. 23rd St. and W. Greenfield Ave. During my 17 years as 8th District Alderman I have never seen any criminal activity flaunted so often and cavalierly as we are seeing at S. 23rd and Greenfield every day!

It saddens and sickens me that the activity has ramped up, in my view, because of the heroin epidemic. Those engaged in the prostitution related activities shoot up and then just throw their needles into the street or in the gutter, left behind for children to see and for someone else to remove (the same goes for spent condoms – disgusting!).

It is difficult for most citizens and observers to imagine what it must be like to live down the block or across the street from this daily activity. No one should have to live with blatant prostitution happening outside their windows!

Alderman Perez and I have done our due diligence and we have stood up for our constituents. We have held numerous meetings with the police, with the District Attorney's office, with the City Attorney's Office and with Chief Flynn (with the exception of the City Attorney's Office, largely to no avail).

Prostitution has been a concern along portions of National, Greenfield and Lincoln avenues for years but it has never, ever, ever been as out of control as it is now. Years ago I would have placed a call to a police sergeant and problems would have been handled quickly. Today the department seems to just be going through the motions on the issue – either unable or unwilling to take decisive action.

I'm told that as a result of our urgings to do something officers have been instructed to increase arrests (in many instances logging valuable overtime in the process), but those arrested are taken in for booking, issued a municipal citation and then released within about an hour to go right back to committing the same crimes.

That approach is a joke!

The arrests, however, provide cover for Chief Flynn (“hey we are doing our job — look at all these arrests we’ve been making”) but do NOTHING to reduce the activity!

Someone needs to explain to Chief Flynn that there IS indeed a difference between activity and results and it is not acceptable in my opinion for MPD to just repeat the same failed efforts. Our citizens deserve far better, for God’s sake.

The prostitution problem is so bad that it may require a monumental effort to restore order. I would hope MPD and the District Attorney are thinking about what that effort might look like and how quickly it can be deployed because the residents have had enough.

I have certainly had enough and I am frustrated beyond words. My responsibility is to my constituents, but my power as an alderman is limited. I can urge the Chief to take action (which I have done repeatedly – please see the **attached recent letter**) but I cannot order him or the department to do anything.

It may require a groundswell of public anger and outrage in Milwaukee to demand action that SOMETHING be done to reduce the prostitution activity and to clamp down on the drug problem that seems to be fueling it.

This is a fight that we cannot back down from and one that we must win.